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for implementing the program, and the implementation process considering the nature and extent of natural resource concerns throughout the State and the availability of human resources to assist with activities related to program enrollment;

(3) Develop program outreach materials at the State and local level to ensure landowners, operators, and tenants of eligible land are aware and informed that they may be eligible for the program;

(4) Develop conservation practice cost-share rates;

(5) Administer and enforce the terms of easements and rental agreements unless this responsibility is delegated to a third party as provided in §1415.17; and

(6) With advice from the State Technical Committee, develop criteria for ranking eligible land, consistent with national criteria and program objectives and address related policy matters regarding program direction for GRP in the applicable State. USDA, at the State level, has the authority to accept or reject the State Technical Committee recommendations; however, USDA will give consideration to the State Technical Committee's recommendations.

(c) The funds, facilities, and authorities of the Commodity Credit Corporation are available to NRCS and FSA to implement GRP.

(d) Subject to funding availability, the program may be implemented in any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands of the United States, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

(e) The Secretary may modify or waive a provision of this part if he or she deems the application of that provision to a particular limited situation to be inappropriate and inconsistent with the environmental and cost-efficiency goals of GRP. This authority cannot be further delegated. No provision of this part which is required by applicable law may be waived.

(f) No delegation in this part to lower organizational levels shall preclude the Chief, NRCS, or the Administrator, FSA, from determining any issue arising

under this part or from reversing or modifying any determination arising from this part.

(g) The Chief, NRCS, may delegate at any time Federal easement administration and enforcement responsibilities to approved State Agencies, or approved private conservation or land trust organizations with the consent or at the request of the participating landowner. The USDA Forest Service may hold easements on properties adjacent to USDA Forest Service land, with the consent of the landowner.

(h) Program participation is voluntary.

(i) Applications for participation will be accepted on a continual basis at local USDA Service Centers. NRCS and FSA at the State level will establish cut-off periods to rank and select applications. These cut-off periods will be available in program outreach material provided by the local USDA Service Center. Once funding levels have been exhausted, eligible applications will remain on file until additional funding becomes available or the applicant chooses to be removed from consideration.

(j) The services of other third parties as provided for in 7 CFR part 652 may be used to provide technical services to participants.

§ 1415.3 Definitions.

Administrator means the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) or the person delegated authority to act for the Administrator.

Chief means the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or the person delegated authority to act for the Chief.

Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) is a Government-owned and operated entity that was created to stabilize, support, and protect farm income and prices. CCC is managed by a Board of Directors, subject to the general supervision and direction of the Secretary of Agriculture, who is an ex-officio director and chairperson of the Board. The Chief and Administrator are Vice Presidents of CCC. CCC provides the funding for GRP, and FSA and NRCS administer the GRP on its behalf.

Conservation District means any district or unit of State, tribal, or local

government formed under State, tribal, or territorial law for the express purpose of developing and carrying out a local soil and water conservation program. Such district or unit of government may be referred to as a “conservation district,” “soil conservation district,” “resource conservation district,” “land conservation committee,” or similar name.

Conservation plan means a record of the client's decisions and supporting information, for treatment of a land unit or water as a result of the planning process, that meets NRCS Field Office Technical Guide quality criteria for each natural resource (soil, water, air, plants, and animals) and takes into account economic and social considerations. The plan describes the schedule of operations and activities needed to solve identified natural resource problems and take advantage of opportunities at a conservation management system level. The needs of the client, the resources, Federal, State, and local requirements will be met by carrying out the plan.

Conservation practice means a specified treatment, such as a structural or land management practice, that is planned and applied according to NRCS standards and specifications.

Cost-share agreement means the document that specifies the obligations and the rights of any person who has been accepted for participation in the program.

Department means United States Department of Agriculture.

Easement means a conservation easement, which is an interest in land defined and delineated in a deed whereby the landowner conveys certain rights, title, and interests in a property to the United States for the purpose of protecting the grassland and other conservation values of the property. Under GRP, the property rights are conveyed in a “conservation easement deed.”

Easement area means the land encumbered by an easement.

Easement payment means the consideration paid to a landowner for an easement conveyed to the United States under the Grassland Reserve Program.

Field office technical guide means the official local NRCS source of resource

information and interpretations of guidelines, criteria, and standards for planning and applying conservation treatments and conservation management systems. It contains detailed information for the conservation of soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources applicable to the local area for which it is prepared.

Forb means any herbaceous plant other than those in the grass family.

Grantor is the term used for the landowner that is transferring land rights to the United States through an easement.

Grassland means land on which the vegetation is dominated by grasses, grass-like plants, shrubs, and forbs. The definition of grassland as used in the context of this part includes shrubland, land that contains forbs, pastureland, and rangeland.

Grazing value means the value assigned to the grassland cover by USDA.

Improved pasture means grazing land permanently producing natural forage species that receives varying degrees of periodic cultural treatment to enhance forage quality and yields and is primarily harvested by grazing animals.

Landowner means a person or persons holding fee title to the land.

Native means a species that is a part of the original fauna or flora of the area.

Natural means a native or an introduced species that is adapted to the ecological site and can perpetuate itself in the community without cultural treatment. For the purposes of this part the term “natural” does not include noxious weeds.

Participant means a landowner, operator, or tenant who is a party to a GRP agreement. The term “agreement” in this context refers to GRP rental agreements and option to purchase agreements for easements. Landowners of land subject to a GRP easement are also considered participants regardless of whether such landowner initiated the sale of the easement to the Federal Government.

Pastureland means a land cover/use category of land managed primarily for the production of introduced forage plants for grazing animals. Pastureland cover may consist of a single species in a pure stand, a grass mixture, or a

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grass-legume mixture. Management usually consists of cultural treatments: fertilization, weed control, re-seeding or renovation, and control of grazing.

Permanent easement means an easement that lasts in perpetuity.

Private land means land that is not owned by a governmental entity.

Rangeland means a land cover/use category on which the climax or potential plant cover is composed principally of native grasses, grasslike plants, forbs, or shrubs suitable for grazing and browsing, and introduced forage species that are managed like rangeland. Rangeland includes lands re-vegetated naturally or artificially when routine management of that vegetation is accomplished mainly through manipulation of grazing. This term would include areas where introduced hardy and persistent grasses, such as crested wheatgrass, are planted and such practices as deferred grazing, burning, chaining, and rotational grazing are used, with little or no chemicals or fertilizer being applied. Grasslands, savannas, many wetlands, some deserts, and tundra are considered to be rangeland. Certain communities of low forbs and shrubs, such as mesquite, chaparral, mountain shrub, and pinyon-juniper, are also included as rangeland.

Rental agreement means an agreement where the participant will be paid annual rental payments for the length of the agreement to maintain and/or restore grassland functions and values under the Grassland Reserve Program.

Restoration means implementing any conservation practice (vegetative, management, or structural) that improves the values and functions of grassland (native and natural plant communities).

Restoration agreement means an agreement between the program participant and the United States Department of Agriculture to restore or improve the functions and values of grassland and shrubland.

Restored grassland means land that is to be converted back to grassland or shrubland.

Secretary means the Secretary of Agriculture.

Shrubland means land that the dominant plant species is shrubs, which are plants that are persistent, have woody stems, a relatively low growth habit, and generally produces several basal shoots instead of a single bole.

Significant decline means a decrease of a species population to such an extent that it merits direct intervention to halt further decline, as determined by the NRCS State Conservationist in consultation with the State Technical Committee.

Similar function and value means plants that are alike in growth habit, environmental requirements, and provide substantially the same ecological benefits.

State Technical Committee means a committee established by the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture in a State pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 3861.

USDA means the Chief, NRCS, in consultation with the Administrator, FSA or the NRCS State Conservationist in consultation with the FSA State Executive Director.

§ 1415.4 Program requirements.

(a) Only landowners may submit applications for easements. For rental agreements, the applicant must provide evidence of control of the property for the duration of the rental agreement.

(b) The easement and rental agreement shall require that the area be maintained in accordance with GRP goals and objectives for the duration of the term of the easement or rental agreement, including the conservation, protection, and restoration of the grassland functions and values.

(c) All participants in GRP will be required to implement a conservation plan approved by USDA to preserve the viability of the grassland enrolled into the program. The conservation plan will document the conservation values, characteristics, current and future use of the land, practices that may need to be applied along with a schedule for application, and a management plan.

(d) The easement and rental agreement shall grant USDA or its representatives a right of access to the easement and rental agreement area.